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THE STUDY OF CEREMONY.¹

MORE than a year ago, I had a conversation with the permanent secretary of the American Folk-Lore Society in regard to the propriety of directing the attention of students to the study of ceremony, and it was agreed that I should prepare a paper to be read before the society at its last meeting, setting forth the importance of this study, the necessity for minute observation and record in connection with it, the methods and opportunities for its pursuit.

I failed to do this at the last annual meeting of the society, because at that time I was engaged in the preparation of the fifth volume of the *Memoirs of the American Folk-Lore Society*, the publication of which had been delayed longer than I had anticipated, and I fail now to offer you a paper of a character so ambitious as I had originally planned, because all this year I have been travelling over the western land in pursuit of health, busy with the routine of the sanitarium and the health resort, and far removed from the libraries whence I had hoped to draw important illustrations.

I have no learned treatise to offer you even now, I have no exact data to give, and I do not challenge criticism. I have only to present to you, in a desultory way, a few thoughts that have been floating through my mind, in order that we may make a formal beginning of ceremony as a special department of study.

An early search of mine, when I took the matter into consideration, was to find a suitable name for the science. With this object in view, I consulted a scientific friend in Washington, an anthropologist, who has had experience in coining new words from the Greek and Latin, and told him my wishes. "I do not see what you want with a word ending in 'logy' or 'graphy' to indicate the study of ceremonies," he said to me, "for you can create no science of ceremonies, and can formulate no laws concerning them." He seemed

¹ Paper read at joint meeting of Section H, American Association for the Advancement of Science, and the American Folk-Lore Society, Detroit, August 10, 1897.

incredulous when I told him that at least one student of ceremony hoped we could develop a science and formulate laws. Whether we shall succeed in this remains to be determined; but in the mean time the remark of this gentleman indicates, I believe, the general opinion of the scientific world with regard to the subject.

No doubt, also, many will question the importance of the study of ceremony, and in defending its importance I shall for the present do nothing more than offer a personal opinion. I believe, as the result of an extensive experience, that ceremony offers material for the study of human development equal to that offered by art, government, legend, or any other subject of ethnologic investigation. Religion, of course, has been already extensively studied, and has received the attention of some of the brightest minds in the scientific world, but it has been studied more through its doctrines and literary expressions than through its ceremony and symbolism.

The accurate study of ceremony has heretofore suffered much neglect. Within the last ten or twelve years, it is true, some notable contributions have been made to our knowledge of American aboriginal ceremony; but they constitute only a small part of that which still exists or has but recently existed. The reasons for this neglect are numerous.

1. The gleaners of ethnologic notes have been, heretofore, mostly of the wandering kind,—men who spent but a short time among any one people, and who, during that short time, were too much engrossed by other observations to seek for ceremony.

2. Ceremony, even of a merely worshipful character, is one of the things about which people are sensitive and reticent. They do not readily impart their knowledge to a stranger or admit him to the gloomy adytum of their temple. True, there are public scenes pertaining to many rites; but these are not to be fully comprehended until the antecedent or more secret elements of the rite are also known.

3. Until recently there were very few white men who could entirely divest themselves of their early bias, who could altogether rid themselves of an inbred contempt for pagan rites, or who could, in the presence of pagans, conceal their antipathy to the performance of what George Catlin calls "hocus-pocus." The pagans are, alas, observing and suspicious, and the slightest evidence of disdain on the part of the inquirer easily closes the door to knowledge. To gain the confidence of his instructors one may have, at times, to feign a reverence which he does not feel; but in so doing he should remember that he performs an act of simple courtesy, and need not accuse himself of hypocrisy.

4. Another quality lacking in many observers is patience. Much

of the hocus-pocus may seem tedious, silly, and unworthy of record ; but in omitting to note the apparently most trifling particulars, he may lose the most valuable material for comparative study. In the long vigil of a rite which lasts from nightfall to dawn, he may allow sleep to overcome him at the most critical moment. Eternal vigilance is the price of other things besides liberty.

5. Again, observers are likely to underrate the character of the people with whom they are dealing. Seeing them perhaps poor, squalid, and apparently dull of comprehension, it is difficult to believe they can have an imaginative religious cult, and it is easy to take it for granted that they have none. Having a different code of morals from ours, it is a facile conclusion that they have no code. The list of races who were supposed to have no religion was much larger twenty years ago than it is to-day. The investigations of the next twenty years may leave no list at all. An eminent writer on anthropology has recently felt constrained to modify the ordinary definitions of religion in order to maintain an old theory that there were races of men without religion.

6. Another difficulty with investigators is that they do not consider the lore of the priesthood to have a commercial value. The priest who practises a rite may have paid large sums to his instructors, or he may have spent years of patient labor in acquiring his knowledge from a father, an uncle, or some interested relative. He would probably charge a student of his own race a good price for his teaching. He is not willing to surrender all he knows to a stranger for a trifle. If he thinks he will receive but a cup of coffee and a plug of tobacco for his pains, he is likely to impart information to that value and no more.

But while the difficulties attending the collection of data in simple worshipful or curative rites are enormous, when we come to the study of rites of an esoteric character the difficulties are vastly increased ; perhaps in some respects they are absolutely insurmountable. The day, possibly, may never come — at least it is far off — when the comparative study of esoteric cultus can be publicly and freely discussed. The lips of the civilized brother are sealed with regard to the work of his order, although in these days of law he has little punishment to fear if he reveals his secret ; but the lips of his savage *confrère* are all the more firmly closed, for he has the vengeance of the gods to dread, and perhaps the vengeance of man. Yet I am aware that some of the most interesting survivals in the history of human development are to be found in the rites of secret societies.

The tendency to the formation and maintenance of secret orders among men affords an interesting problem to the psychologist and

sociologist. That these societies had practical uses in savage and even in mediæval days is easily demonstrated; their practical uses at the present time are not so obvious, yet there was never a time in the history of civilized man when such organizations were so numerous or had so many members.

It is not generally known that, in proportion to population, such societies claim (or until lately did claim) a greater membership among some of our American tribes than they claim among ourselves. I have knowledge of a tribe which, twenty-five years ago, had apparently all its male members, from the age of five years up, enrolled in one or more of these organizations. The first degree in some cases was conferred about the age of five, the next at about the age of fifteen, and so on; different degrees were attained at various ages, until the last was reached at about sixty. Each class, or chapter, when its time came for promotion, paid for its introduction into the degree beyond, and, I have heard, often paid prices which would astonish members of some of our most select metropolitan lodges.

But the secrets in all cases were sacredly held. I once had a gentleman tell me that among one of the civilized tribes of the Indian Territory there was a secret meeting in a medicine lodge, and he had to await its conclusion in order that he might transact business with a member who was taking part in the rites. When the work was over, the member in question appeared. He was a man of apparently pure European blood, dressed in the clothing of civilization, speaking good English, and to all appearances an ordinary American citizen. My informant, in the course of conversation, asked him what they were doing in the lodge. The so-called Indian replied: "No money could buy me, and nothing else could induce me to reveal in the slightest degree what happened in that lodge." My informant expressed great scorn for so conservative an Indian, yet he would have received a similar reply to a similar question from the most intelligent American freemason.

There is an initiation among the Navahoes which is usually given in boyhood, and there are few men in the tribe who have not received it. My friend Benjamin Damon, a Navaho half-breed, escaped it in his youth, his father being a white man who knew nothing of the advantages to be gained by the initiation and never told his son to take it. Ben went east, to school, for five years, and when he returned to his native land I induced him, for purposes of my own, to submit himself to the ordeal of this rite. He told me afterwards that when he was a child he had frequently asked his most intimate playmates to describe the initiation to him, and that he never could get the slightest information from them.

No doubt, some of the best material for this study among our American Indians is irretrievably lost, but much remains, and we have better means of learning that remainder now than in the old days, for the Indian has grown less conservative and reticent. We need not be discouraged. If we go earnestly and quickly to work, much may be recovered. The ordinary progress of Christianity and civilization has done a large share in bringing the old rites into disuse; but it is not generally known that the arbitrary employment of governmental power has done much more. Religious freedom is assured to all within the borders of this "glorious republic," except to the original owner of the soil. He alone may not worship according to the dictates of his conscience. The alien Mongoloid may set up his pagan temple in the streets of San Francisco and burn incense before his idol, but the native Mongoloid is allowed to attempt no such liberties. The experience of the Shakers of Washington, as related by Mr. Mooney, shows us that it is not even considered well for the Indian to start a new Christian sect of his own; that it is supposed proper for him to take his Christianity altogether at second hand.

I have often told in conversation my experience among the Arickarees of what is now North Dakota, in 1865, and have gained little reputation for veracity by the telling. These Indians lived in a permanent village, raised corn, and supported themselves largely by agriculture. In the winter they left their permanent village, which was situated on a bleak prairie terrace, and built, at a distance of a few miles, a temporary camp in the forests of the Missouri bottoms, where their habitations would be more sheltered, and where the labor of procuring fuel would be easy. During the autumn, before going to this winter camp, they spent a season of about three months in an almost ceaseless round of ceremonies, which differed every day. Something seemed to be always going on in the plaza of the village or in its great medicine lodge. The work in the lodge during the daytime was secret,—the uninitiated were not admitted, but from time to time groups of men picturesquely painted and adorned issued forth to dance or act rude dramas on the plaza. Not only the men, but the women, the children, the adolescent boys and girls, had dances or ceremonies. At night, after dark, the medicine lodge was open to the profane and we, idle white men, who had nothing to read (we got mail once in three months), and little to do but play cards and interchange prevarications, went there as regularly as we might go to a theatre in a city, to see their performances, to hear them sing their ritual songs, in which the women joined, and to witness the rude acts of legerdemain which constituted a large part of the entertainment.

What has become of all this ceremony? I have heard recently that the village has totally disappeared, — not a vestige of it is left, — and the existence of a compact village was essential to the performance of most of these rites. The Indians are scattered on farms. The families live a good way apart, as in a white farming community. If they practise any of their old rites, they must do it in secret. But it is probable few of the rites survive. Many of the dancers of thirty-two years ago, of course, are still alive; but the younger ones, at least, are to-day members of Christian churches, and are taught to look with contempt on the old cultus.

But all tribes have not suffered such important changes as the Arickarees. In many self-sustaining communities, such as the Pueblos of New Mexico and Arizona, where no rations were to be withheld, and the government could not easily coerce, the old rites have been continued. In other tribes, scattered over a wide territory where surveillance is difficult, the pagan cultus has no doubt also survived. The agents have depended largely, for the suppression of the rites, upon an organization known as the Indian police, and it is probable that this force often continues in sympathy with the people, and is none too active in reporting lapses from virtue. Much of this interesting material has been lost to science; but, no doubt, something still remains to reward the patient investigator.

In his recent valuable work on the "Ghost-dance Religion," Mr. James Mooney gives an interesting instance of the existence of pagan worship under the vigilant eye of government authority (p. 767). He wrote to the Indian agent at Pyramid Lake, Nevada, on one of whose reservations (Walker Lake) the prophet of the Ghost-dance was living, for information concerning the prophet and the dance. Under date of October 24, 1891, the agent replied: "There are neither ghost-songs, dances, nor ceremonies among them (*i. e.* the Indians) about my agencies. Would not be allowed. I think they died out with Sitting Bull." But Mr. Mooney assures us that the rites of the Ghost-dance had been conducted, at the time the agent wrote, in his immediate neighborhood, constantly, for three years, and that only a short time before a large delegation from beyond the mountains had attended a Ghost-dance near Walker Lake, Nevada, which lasted four days and nights.

I have, in this brief paper, confined my remarks chiefly to ceremony among our American Indians, because this is the ground with which I am most familiar; but there is a wide field for study not only among the barbarous races of the old world, and rustic Europeans, but among the most enlightened and exalted members of our own race. Among the latter we trace, with astonishing clearness, the survival of savage customs.

If you consult an encyclopædia on the subject of freemasonry, you will usually find it stated that the order arose in the middle ages, when the energy of the Europeans was largely devoted to the building of great churches. The most enthusiastic mason will not give a date for the origin of his craft earlier than the building of Solomon's temple. It is obvious, of course, that such well-known symbols as the square, the compass, and the level could only have been employed in a day of comparatively high civilization, when the art of architecture was well developed. Yet modern freemasonry holds much of its symbolism in common with the Indian rites, and I am satisfied that it had its beginning in the period of savagery. It is but a growth, a modified survival. We might express the idea by saying that there were lost degrees of masonry.

A comparative study of worship will show that the same principles control the forms of worship among the lowest and the highest. I have not now time to enter into the details which support this statement, but I may do so on some future occasion.

In addition to the ceremonies of religion and fraternity, the ceremonies of social intercourse and every-day life are valuable subjects for study. Much has already been done in tracing the origin of our every-day customs; but, unfortunately, speculation has here been more active than investigation.

I will now close as I began, by seeking a term for this science. Dr. J. Walter Fewkes has already employed the word *ceremoniology*, a term which I believe he has originated; it is not to be found in any dictionary. It is a convenient term, but it has one fault; it is not all derived from a single language. True, we have examples in the English dictionaries of words formed with a Latin root and a Greek ending; but such words are not to be favored when we can do better. I cannot find that there is any word in Greek as comprehensive as our word *ceremony*. The term *latreiology* has been suggested; but the designation, in its strictest sense, would refer only to the ceremonies of worship. Of course the word might be extended to include all ceremony; we have good precedent for thus extending the meaning of a term. Last autumn I asked Prof. A. J. Huntington, of the Columbian University in Washington, to coin a word for me. In his last letter to me, he says that a correspondent has suggested the terms *teletology* and *teletology*, but he expresses dissatisfaction with both as being derived from *telete*, which denotes initiation into a religious rite, or a religious ceremony, and he closes by saying: "I have taken the greatest pleasure in trying to aid you, but I think the perfectly satisfactory accomplishment of the task (if so I may call it) was impracticable."

Washington Matthews.